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ABSTRACT

In this document, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) develops a framework to assist state policymakers, particularly, as well as other stakeholders, in initiating debate and reforms to redefine expectations and the role and responsibilities of school boards in fulfilling these expectations. These recommendations draw upon: analyses of findings from IEL's national studies of school boards in 1985-86 and 1991-92; self-assessment data from almost 300 school boards that participated in the demonstration of IEL's School Board Effectiveness Program in 1987-90; direct work with boards, urban school systems, superintendents, and state school-boards associations; discussions with education reformers and policymakers across the nation; and conclusions from participation with national task forces and other groups deliberating the issue of local education governance. Part 1 presents 15 legislative proposals considered essential to the restructuring of school boards, and part 2 contains 6 recommendations for additional legislative provisions. Part 3 offers suggestions regarding full financial-disclosure requirements for board candidates and members, board standing committees, and teacher-union influence on board elections. In general, the recommendations are based on the following propositions: (1) the state must assume responsibility for school-board reform; (2) reform should entail fundamental change; (3) reform should involve local stakeholders; and (4) reform should strengthen local governance. (LMI)

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Supporting Leaders for Tomorrow

ED 366 100

A FRAMEWORK FOR REDEFINING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

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IEL also wishes to recognize the contribution of the Joyce Foundation to our study of the role and responsibilities of school boards in the restructuring of public schools. Findings from that study helped inform the recommendations in this paper.

Colleagues from the Education Commission of the States, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors' Association, Coalition for Policy Research in Education, National Civic League, and Business Coalition for Education Reform provided valuable input. Their participation during the early developmental stages of this work does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of any of the specific recommendations.

We wish to thank also Ellen Hoffman who worked with us to present our recommendations so that they might become a framework for possible state legislation, as well as a guide for broad discussion and debate about local education governance.

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September, 1993

A FRAMEWORK FOR REDEFINING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

Local school boards, like so many major American public institutions, find themselves increasingly criticized as the nation struggles to reform the structure, organization, content and outcomes of public schooling. These largely volunteer and elected lay boards served the nation well through its development. But, the governing challenges today and the glacier like pace of implementation of systemic education reform proposals pose serious questions about whether this eighteenth century institution is structurally suited to govern effectively in an increasingly conflicted and divisive society facing profound social, economic, and technological changes. School boards, (particularly in larger urban school districts), suffer from an increasing crisis of confidence in their capacity to provide far-sighted leadership, improve student achievement, and implement systemic education reforms. At the same time, the idea of separate citizen governing boards at the community level for the public schools is deeply embedded in grass-roots American political values. The American public is not ready to turn over education policymaking for their children to professional educators or to political officeholders in units of general purpose government for whom public education is but one responsibility.

We believe that there is an important and positive role for local lay governing boards that represent and are responsible to all citizens. While we support and encourage devolving decision-making and much greater autonomy to individual schools, we do not concur with elimination of community policy boards. School site staff and parents do not represent all stakeholders in the public schools. Only 25-30% of U.S. households have school age children. Citizens in the other 70-75% of households cannot be expected to become involved in or responsible for the public schools in their communities if they have no role in a broad political process for governing the schools.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) developed the attached **Framework** to assist state policymakers, particularly, and also other stakeholders, in initiating debate and reforms to redefine expectations and the role and responsibilities of school boards in fulfilling these expectations. The recommendations draw upon: analyses of findings from IEL's national studies of school boards in 1985-86[1] and 1991-92[2]; self-assessment data from almost 300 school boards which participated in the demonstration of IEL's School Board Effectiveness Program in 1987-90; direct work with boards, urban school systems, superintendents, and

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[1] Institute for Educational Leadership, School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership, Washington, D.C., 1986.

[2] Jacqueline P. Danzberger, Michael W. Kirst, Michael D. Usdan, Governing Public Schools: New Times, New Requirements, The Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C., 1992.

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state school boards associations; discussions with education reformers and policymakers across the nation; and conclusions from participation with national task forces and other groups deliberating the issue of local education governance.

States must assume responsibility for school board reform. States control boards through statutorily-created codes and mandates. Only state action can redefine expectations of these local governing bodies, and redefine their roles and responsibilities to meet new expectations. Assistance from the state is also critical to changing the public's growing perception of the school boards' role from that of political bodies which are compelled to accede to multiple special interest groups and individual constituent demands and be involved in detailed management of school systems. Institutions rarely reform themselves absent external pressure; it is almost impossible for political institutions to do so. There are few incentives and many disincentives for self-reform. Laudable efforts exist within the school board community exhorting boards to adopt new behaviors and to refocus on essential policymaking responsibilities supported by increased training for school board members. Several states enacted legislation over the past several years mandating very limited training for new or sitting members of school boards. Such developmental activities are important, but inadequate to accomplish real and enduring reforms. The corporate governing behaviors are the real problem and there is little evidence that most boards will commit to sustained development; urban boards are least apt to commit time and resources to improving their effectiveness. Further, substantial turnover in board members occurs each year (approximately one third across the nation). Training alone cannot produce sustainable reformed governing behaviors over time; training absent reforms embedded in state policy cannot change the governing culture of school boards. In addition, board members themselves, state that constitutent pressures on them to practice mirror representation, preserve the status quo and govern through the details militate against changing boards' conduct.

These recommendations for state action call for fundamental change, not just tinkering with what is and enacting piecemeal legislation to deal only with symptoms and not with basic problems. Americans, and state policymakers are no exception, look for "silver bullets" to solve problems, e.g. (in this instance), changing from elected to appointed boards, mandating school site councils as a way to make schools more responsive when the central school boards appear to be in grid-lock, and so forth. These are exercises in futility absent concerted reform of school boards. State policymakers have basically ignored school boards -- both in helping to strengthen them and involving them in major state education reform efforts. This is patently a disservice to the hard working and basically well motivated citizens who serve on boards and a loss to state policy-makers of the possibility of developing valuable state-local dialogues about education reform.

Accomplishing school board restructuring will be politically difficult, perhaps the most politically volatile of all attempted reforms. State policymakers should initiate school board reform as a positive move to strengthen local governance, not as a punitive reform. We recommend involving the school board community, representatives of municipal and county government, superintendents, teachers, the business community and citizen groups to consider and shape this reform

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framework in each state and to build a coalition for school board reform. When reforms are enacted, states should commit to transitional support for boards as they change into true education policy boards and support activities to educate the public to new expectations of their local school boards.

The legislative proposals are divided into two parts. **PART ONE** contains provisions we believe are essential to restructuring school boards into effective governing bodies better able to accomplish systemic education reforms. **PART TWO** contains suggestions for additional legislative provisions we believe would be useful in encouraging reform of both school boards and education policy. **PART THREE** of the recommendations presents suggestions for study and discussion of emerging issues affecting local school boards and their operational behaviors, but for which legislative remedies are not readily apparent.

We hope that this document will stimulate widespread dialogue and debate about the role of school boards, encourage state policymakers and other major stakeholders in public education to focus much more explicitly on local governance issues, and create a greater sense of urgency about the need for action within state legislatures.

Additional copies are available for $4.00 each from IEL. Clean copy for reproduction may be purchased for $2.00. For more information about the recommendations, please write or call:

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A FRAMEWORK FOR REDEFINING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

WHEREAS

- School boards need to be reconfigured to refocus on educational policy and provide leadership for public education;
- The role of school boards has not been systematically re-examined or re-configured in this country since the 1920's;
- School boards often function as legislative, judicial and executive agencies concurrently, thus burdening members with demanding roles that may have little to do with the substance of education;
- The needs of students have changed dramatically in recent decades;
- Technological, economic and social forces are transforming the demands that our society and the global economy place on public education;
- Education reform over the last decade or more has rarely, if ever, addressed the role of the school board;
- This is a time of opportunity, with the business community taking unprecedented interest in education reform, and many segments of the public and public officials seeking ways to improve the educational system; and
- Local school boards are a creation of the state, and require the assistance of state authorities and the force of state law to redefine their role;
- The legislature of the State of _____ enacts the following law.

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INTENT

It is the intent of the legislature to:

- Transform local school boards into education policy boards to focus on development, implementation and oversight of policies that improve the academic achievement of all students in this state;
- Increase the ability of school boards to focus on the pressing policy issues that face public education by relieving them of responsibility for detailed management and budget implementation decisions;
- Require local school boards to play an active role in oversight of the educational process in their districts;
- Strive to change the perceptions and expectations of the citizenry about the appropriate role of local school boards;
- Enable school boards to make the most effective, economical use of existing resources; and
- Provide school boards with a flexible framework that allows them to create policies that serve the particular needs of the students and community in their district;

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A FRAMEWORK FOR REDEFINING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

PART ONE SUMMARY LIST

1. Repeal all current laws and regulations that specify the duties, functions, selection and role of school boards; and rename the school board the "Local Education Policy Board."

2. Develop the vision for the school district and engage in short and long-term strategic planning to reach consensus on district and school-level goals and objectives, school performance indicators and student assessment outcomes. The strategic plan that results from this process shall guide the board's decisions about school district policies including, but not limited to, the budget, curricular frameworks, student assessment, employee and personnel policies and staff development. The strategic planning process shall be inclusive, inviting the participation of the community at large as well as professionals in the school system.

3. Hire, evaluate, and define the role of the superintendent of the district and, with the superintendent, define roles and participation, hiring and evaluation of cabinet-level administrators. The board shall establish personnel policies to guide the hiring of principals and all other district personnel, but shall not become involved in other individual personnel decisions, except where principals are members of the cabinet in small school districts.

4. Approve the school district budget, ensuring that spending priorities are consistent with the goals and objectives in the strategic plan. The board shall establish policies to guide the school administration's decisions on individual expenditures, but except in the case of large construction projects, shall not take action on individual contracts, purchase orders or change orders.

5. Determine policies and guidelines for negotiating employee contracts and approve negotiated contracts. The school board shall not negotiate directly with representatives of employee organizations. School boards shall have policies and guidelines for communications with the media and the public during negotiations.

6. Approve curricular frameworks and standards for student achievement.

7. Provide policy coherence by linking policies and reform initiatives to student outcome objectives, curricular frameworks and assessment.

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8. Establish policies for staff development that ensure coherence with the district's educational goals and objectives.

9. Develop a system for reviewing individual school performance on a systematic and periodic basis.

10. Hire administrative law judges or another type of qualified third party to hear and decide complaints and appeals on issues that affect individual students of staff, including expulsions, transfers to neighboring school districts or grievances.

11. Establish a procedure outside the school board to hear and decide constituent complaints.

12. Establish policies to facilitate and encourage cooperation and collaboration with appropriate units of general government and other agencies, organizations and institutions serving children, youth, and families.

13. Convene community forums to discuss major education policy issues and to provide leadership for public education.

14. Conduct a regular and periodic self-assessment of the school board -- including community input.

15. Commit the school board to an ongoing process of learning and development based on the results of the self-assessment and on the need to keep abreast of important developments in educational policy and practice.

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PART ONE

1. **Repeal all current laws and regulations that specify the duties, functions, selection and role of school boards; and rename the school board the "Local Education Policy Board."**

   Rationale and Explanation: Enactment of this provision would minimize the likelihood of conflict between the new responsibilities of school boards and existing law; and would give boards a name that is more consistent with their new responsibilities.

2. **Develop the vision for the school district and engage in short and long-term strategic planning to reach consensus on district and school-level goals and objectives, school performance indicators and student assessment outcomes. The strategic plan that results from this process shall guide the board's decisions about school district policies including, but not limited to, the budget, curricular frameworks, student assessment, employee and personnel policies and staff development.**

   The strategic planning process shall be inclusive, inviting the participation of the community at large, as well as professionals in the school system.

   Rationale and Explanation: At a time when public education faces a constant stream of new, changing and demanding challenges, local school boards need to become education POLICY boards. They need to be freed from the many time-consuming, routine decisions -- acting on each individual expenditure after the budget has been approved, approving field trips, even fixing leaky school building roofs -- that distract them from the hard, serious business of designing and overseeing an education program that serves the present and future needs of the students, the community, state and nation.

   The first step in designing such a program is to discuss, debate and reach consensus on a vision of the education program needed in each school district. The next step is to create a strategic plan that includes short- and long-term, goals, objectives, performance indicators and pupil assessment systems. Because they encompass many different student and community needs within their borders, for large urban and suburban districts, the strategic plan should include substantial flexibility for individual schools to fashion their own strategies for meeting the board's goals.

   A vision and a strategic plan constitute a path the school district can follow in making decisions on many specific issues, ranging from budgeting to staff development and curricular frameworks. A vision and a strategic plan also provide a yardstick by which the school board, individual schools and the community can measure the district's progress toward its goals.

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Because the public schools serve not only the students within them but the community as a whole, members of the public shall have specific, meaningful opportunities -- such as testifying at a public hearing--to contribute to developing the plan.

This provision would bring school boards up to date by requiring them to adopt some of the management processes that are already widely practiced in business, non-profit and other public spheres in our society.

3. **Hire, evaluate and define the role of the superintendent of the district and, with the superintendent, define roles and participation, hiring and evaluation of cabinet-level administrators. The board shall establish personnel policies to guide the hiring of principals and all other district personnel, but shall not become involved in other individual personnel decisions, except where principals are members of the cabinet in small school districts.**

Rationale and Explanation: Many school boards become involved in time-consuming decisions to hire, fire and promote principals and many other school district staff. This detracts from the time available to focus on development and oversight of education policy.

In some states, this provision would terminate the existing system of electing superintendents, thus removing the selection of a superintendent from the political arena and emphasizing the importance of choosing the best qualified candidate, not the most popular one.

This provision emphasizes that the board should clearly define the role of the superintendent, focus on hiring the best person for that job, and conduct periodic evaluations of the superintendent's performance in that role.

In general, school boards should not, except as noted, hire, fire or promote personnel except for the superintendent. They should be notified of all appointments and conduct periodic reviews to ascertain whether board policies are being followed. But they should not, for example, interview all potential principals.

There may be one possible exception to this policy -- in a very small district, the board may become involved in personnel decisions affecting the district's few administrators.

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4. **Approve the school district budget, ensuring that spending priorities are consistent with the goals and objectives in the strategic plan. The board shall establish policies to guide the school administration's decisions on individual expenditures, but except in the case of large construction projects, shall not take action on individual contracts, purchase orders or change orders.**

Rationale and Explanation: This provision will have a major impact on how many school boards spend their time. It explicitly changes the fiduciary role of many boards, which are accustomed to making individual decisions even on very minor expenditures, contracts or purchase orders. This practice places financial management decisions in a political environment that is not always in the best interest of the students or the district.

Eliminating this role will provide board members with more time to exercise their role of policy-making and oversight of the district's educational effort.

To ensure proper financial control, the school board should establish clear priorities and procedures, monitor budget decisions and require the school administration to provide members with regular reports on the status of the budget. To ensure proper management of large construction projects, the board might consider appointing a "community building committee" of board members and other citizens to approve change orders and oversee the construction.

In the interest of educating and informing the community about school system needs and objectives, states may want to consider following the example of West Virginia, where state law requires local school boards to hold a public hearing on the operating budget within 10 days after it is made public. The West Virginia law also requires public legal notice of the meeting and requires that members of the public be allowed to speak on all or any part of the budget at the hearing.

5. **Determine policies and guidelines for negotiating employee contracts and approve negotiated contracts. The school board shall not negotiate [illegible] with representatives of employee organizations. School boards shall have policies and guidelines for communications with the media and the public during negotiations.**

Rationale and Explanation: In developing the strategic plan, the school board should consider, explore and be aware of its implications for salaries, promotions and other working conditions for personnel.

With these in mind the board should establish a framework for the collective bargaining process and parameters within which an agreement might be reached.

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However, board members should not actually sit at the table and participate personally in contract negotiations.

It is important for school boards to adopt policies and clear guidelines for conducting and reporting to the public during negotiations, and to adhere to these rigorously. Such policies should specify who has authority to speak for the board and should govern both formal and informal communications with the public.

6. **Approve curricular frameworks and standards for student achievement.**

Rationale and Explanation: CURRICULAR FRAMEWORKS: This provision is designed to engage school board members in the substance of their most important responsibility -- to ensure that the children in their district receive a good education and to assess student progress.

The board should consider, discuss and approve the general content of curriculum to be taught and mastered in district schools -- i.e., decide what knowledge is most important for children in the district to have.

The impact of this provision will vary depending on existing state law. Some states already have a detailed curricular framework that consists of certain material that districts are obligated to teach, and other subjects that may be optional. In this case the board's role will be to work within the state framework to establish curricular priorities that meet the needs of their particular district.

In states with a more general curricular framework, the board may need to "flesh out" the requirements -- e.g., specifying which skills should be taught in 6th grade mathematics.

In states that do not specify a curricular framework at all, and/or leave it up to individual teachers to make most curriculum decisions, the local board may have a much more demanding job -- to cause construction of frameworks that are consistent with the goals and objectives of the district.

MEASURING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: In states that already have student performance standards, school boards cannot abrogate or lower them. They can, however, decide whether the community should establish additional or stronger standards and do so, as long as these standards do not conflict with existing state policy.

In states that do not have performance standards, local boards should set standards to measure the students' progress in meeting the district's educational goals and objectives.

7. **Provide policy coherence by linking policies and reform initiatives to student outcome objectives, curricular frameworks and assessment.**

Rationale and Explanation: We have learned in recent years that to be successful, educational reform must be approached systemically. It is not enough to "fix" one problem with a new program or increased funding. An educational system is a complex entity whose parts interact in ways that we may not understand unless we look for them.

With overall responsibility for educational policies and outcomes, school boards are in a unique position to orchestrate linkages between and among the many different programs and functions of the school district. Few people on the district staff have a working knowledge of the entire spectrum of programs, how they may be duplicative, how resources are assigned to them, or how they relate to the district's goals. In some cases, this lack of coordination may be a factor in the limited success, or even failure, of education reform initiatives.

Once the board has agreed on a strategic plan, it should examine how various programs and policies interact, complement or duplicate each other and how they might be orchestrated to create the most efficient, effective educational program for all students.

To accomplish this goal, the board should systematically link policies such as categorical funding, accreditation, distribution of instructional resources and staff development to the agreed-upon pupil outcomes and curricular frameworks.

8. **Establish policies for staff development that ensure coherence with the district's educational goals and objectives.**

Rationale and Explanation: Typically educational staff may enroll in almost any staff development course or program they choose. It is rare for school districts to require that time or money devoted to staff development be directly related to the staff member's responsibilities within the school or system. Some exceptions to this do occur where there is system-wide curriculum adoption.

All too often, staff development efforts are also deficient in several other ways: they are one-shot events, they are available to staff only when they are already tired from regular duties (such as in the evenings or on the weekend), and they do not offer the participants either individual coaching or an opportunity to follow up on what they have studied. A teacher cannot teach a new math curriculum, for example, after being only briefly introduced to it; he or she also needs intensive follow-up and an opportunity for guided learning after having some classroom experience with the new curriculum.

To ensure that school personnel have the best possible training for teaching children, and to ensure that there are maximum benefits from resources spent on staff development, school boards should take a more active role in defining staff development policies. In states that have staff development programs and requirements, school boards should assess the relevance of these programs for their own districts. If it is appropriate or necessary to achieve the district's goals and objectives, school boards should create additional programs and opportunities to assist staff in guiding students to meet the goals and objectives. In states that do not have programs or requirements, school boards should develop their own local efforts.

9. **Develop a system for reviewing individual school performance on a systematic and periodic basis.**

Rationale and Explanation: This provision addresses the need for assessment of the district's educational progress at the individual school level.

The concept of a school performance report is embodied in law in at least three states -- Washington, New Jersey and Wisconsin. The report will provide the board, the school administration, parents and other citizens with objective information that can be used to measure a school's effectiveness in meeting its own school district goals.

Among the data that must be provided in Washington, Wisconsin or both are: dropout, attendance and retention in grade rates; a summary of student performance on mandated assessments; financial and budget data, including per pupil expenditure; and information about staff and the condition of school buildings. In addition to statistical data, school boards should monitor individual schools' yearly and longer-term objectives, and plans and progress toward objectives.

Boards' reviews of individual schools should also focus on how schools are setting their goals and objectives within the school systems' goals and objectives framework -- school boards' concerns should be for systemic reform and the performance of schools related to system progress.

In carrying out reviews of individual schools, school boards should support sufficient flexibility at the school site in determining how to meet boards' strategic plans and system goals. Boards should not review and have veto power over individual school plans. Boards' concerns must be for the accountability of schools for fulfilling their plans and meeting their objectives, leaving the "how" to school site determination to the degree possible.

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To interpret and make informed decisions on the basis of school performance reports and other data generated by the educational system, boards should have in-depth training in how to monitor and assess school performance. One component of the monitoring and assessment process should be to seek out and receive input from constituents of the schools -- both those who work in the system and the parents, employers, local organizations and many others in the community who have a major stake in or are concerned about the quality of education.

10. **Hire administrative law judges or another type of qualified third party to hear and decide complaints and appeals on issues that affect individual students or staff, including expulsions, transfers to neighboring school districts or grievances.**

Rationale and Explanation: School boards must remove themselves from their often time-consuming, inappropriate, quasi-judicial role. In some districts, school board members actually conduct classroom observations of individual students who are being considered for placement in special education. Boards are frequently enmeshed in disputes arising from administration of employee contracts.

11. **Establish a procedure outside the school board to hear and decide constituent complaints.**

Rationale and Explanation: Because some parents see the school board as the ultimate site of appeal for all of their concerns about schools including location of school bus stops and street crossing guards, and food served in the cafeteria, some boards spend hours listening to and dealing with these constituent issues -- hours that could be better spent developing and overseeing the district's educational policies.

12. **Establish policies to facilitate and encourage cooperation and collaboration with appropriate units of general government and other agencies, organizations and institutions serving children, youth and families.**

Rationale and Explanation: An increasing number of the nation's students have complex health and social needs that have an impact on their ability to succeed in school.

States could require school boards, units of general government and other agencies to collect common demographic, needs assessment and services data and to plan jointly to meet such identified needs. This would enable schools, social service and health agencies, for example, to go beyond simply referring children to other programs and agencies to collaborate on funding and planning services.

The state could also require school boards to meet regularly with other local governmental units to consider creating children's policy councils to collaborate in meeting the needs of children in the community. The Pinellas County, Florida Juvenile Welfare Board is one such effort that has begun to attract national attention.

13. **Convene community forums to discuss major education policy issues and to provide leadership for public education.**

Rationale and Explanation: Education for tomorrow's world is a complex business, and it's difficult for individual citizens as well as school board members to keep up with both the issues and the needs. Yet public education is totally dependent on the citizenry for support and financial resources.

This provision is intended to foster an awareness of future education needs and a broad understanding of the issues and decisions that confront the system and the community. Community meetings -- with invited speakers, or a dialogue with the school board or school system personnel -- provide opportunities for the general public to learn more about national education issues, to have input into how the district shapes its program to meet both local and national needs, and to receive progress reports on the district's efforts.

Another vital purpose for community meetings is to demonstrate the role of the school board as a leader in the substance of education, rather than as a group of politicians who are on call to respond to "constituent" demands such as having a child transferred to another school.

When convening community meetings, school boards should make a special effort to attract not just parents -- only approximately 25-30 percent of U.S. households have schoolage children -- but also a range of business, social, religious and other groups who also have a stake in the success of public education.

14. **Conduct a regular and periodic self-assessment of the school board -- including community input.**

Rationale and Explanation: Two projects conducted by the Institute for Educational Leadership suggest that self-assessment can be both an effective and accurate tool for assisting school boards to set priorities and measure their progress in meeting goals.

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The first study* probed the attitudes of school board members, administrators, teachers and a wide range of community members and leaders about school boards and their functions. The second study** was an analysis of the results of self-assessments (using an instrument developed by IEL) conducted by 268 school boards across the country between 1988 and 1990. Generally, school boards in this sample rated themselves "least effective" in the same areas where they receive criticism from outside critics, i.e., leadership planning and goal setting, policy oversight, lack of impact with units of general government and other agencies, involving the community and parents with the schools, etc.

Once they have created a strategic plan, school boards can focus some of their self-assessment on their progress toward achieving the objectives, and can make mid-course corrections to resolve problems or diversions before they become serious.

Community participation in the self-assessment can both inform the board about public reaction to its work and educate the public about the role of the board. If implemented thoughtfully, involving the key stakeholders and providing adequate time for a meaningful exchange of ideas -- this process could help forge consensus on and marshall support for the community's education priorities.

15. **Commit the school board to an ongoing process of learning and development based on the results of the self-assessment and on the need to keep abreast of important developments in educational policy and practice.**

Rationale and Explanation: School boards should be committed to learning from their self-assessments and to taking action on the basis of the findings. Studies have shown that school boards spend very little time learning about and developing their expertise in education.

The purpose of this provision is to ensure that in a newly defined role as education policy boards, school boards make a conscious and systematic effort to [illegible] about the issues and policies they are addressing, and to develop their governing effectiveness.

States should consider appropriating resources to invest in ongoing school board development.

* School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership
** Governing Public Schools: New Times, New Requirements

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PART TWO

In addition to the "must" provisions contained in PART ONE, we recommend that legislatures consider enacting the following legislative proposals.

Like the provisions in the earlier section, these would reinforce the role of local school boards as education policy makers, open to flexible or new approaches for improving education.

Specifically, we recommend that states:

1. **Schedule school board elections at the same time as the November general elections, or other major municipal or state elections.**

   Rationale: To increase public interest in and the number of citizens who vote in school board elections. An additional compelling reason for this change is its cost effectiveness. Substantial savings of public monies result from holding all elections at the same time. California has moved to this system and has realized such savings.

2. **Require that a majority of school board members be elected at large; but with a minority elected by sub-districts in large cities.**

   Rationale: To ensure that school board members have districtwide constituencies, thus increasing boards' political capacity to govern in the overall interests of their school systems, focus on broader issues of education policy, and reduce polarization among board members.

   School boards composed of all or a majority of members elected from single electoral districts experience very direct and frequently extreme constituent expectations and pressures to make decisions reflecting the specific interests in their electoral districts, rather than those of the school system as a whole. These boards can become individual member offices of constituent services. Constituents in single electoral districts tend to judge "their" board member by how well she or he responds to individuals' demands, solves their problems, or promotes constituent causes.

   Superintendents frequently find they are required to devote an inordinate percentage of their time to servicing the political needs of individual board members, rather than to professional leadership for the system and implementation of board policies.

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The Institute for Educational Leadership's 1986 study of school boards clearly revealed that board members who are elected from discrete electoral districts are subjected to much more constituent pressure and voted much more frequently according to specific constituent demands than did members on the same board who were elected at large.

3. **Formulate policies that encourage school districts to increase school-based management and school-site budget control, and encourage schools to implement a variety of missions and styles and hold them accountable without dictating standardized operating procedures. Boards should hold periodic reviews of how well each school is meeting the district goals and its own site goals.**

Rationale: To encourage individual schools and their staff to [illegible] programs that meet the specific needs of their sites, by giving them more discretion over how to use resources and deploy staff and by establishing principles of accountability.

4. **Authorize school boards to establish charter schools, and/or contract out the operation of schools under the governing authority of school boards.**

Rationale: There is growing pressure in many states to allow operation of schools by groups other than local school boards in order to allow experimentation with schools wholly different in their organization and operation from those operated under system-wide policies and regulations. For example, charter schools have been authorized in Minnesota, Colorado, and Massachusetts. In addition, there are growing examples of school boards that are contracting out the operation of some schools to private contractors, e.g., Baltimore and Dade County, and all schools, Duluth (MN) and Chelsea (MA). In order to meet growing demands for new ideas and operating structures for public schools and at the same time maintain the nationwide institution of public schooling, school boards should be empowered to bring about experimentation and operate a "portfolio" of public schools under their governing authority. Broader opportunities for school boards to establish charter schools a[illegible]ntract out [illegible] schools will also permit a more substantial experience base to explore the implications of separation of the policy function from direct operation of schools.

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5. **Authorize the creation of local children's policy councils, made up of representatives of all agencies with responsibility for policies related to children, youth and families.**

Rationale: To improve communication, encourage exchange of information, encourage collaboration and the most effective use of resources for programs and services to children, youth and families.

6. **Appoint groups of citizens to examine and report back to the board on education policy issues of concern to the district.**

Rationale: To provide avenues for engagement of the community in the educational process, to draw on expertise outside the school board and school administration, and to generate coalitions and other support for the schools

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PART THREE

There are three problem areas for which we have no recommendations for legislative remedies. We urge states to establish a study and discussion process to address the following issues:

1. **Requirements of school board candidates and members for full financial disclosure:**

   There are concerns that financial disclosure laws may deter many well-qualified persons from seeking membership on school boards because they do not wish friends and fellow citizens with whom they relate in their communities to have intimate knowledge of their or their spouses' finances.

   Study and/or discussion would help answer questions such as:

   - Are communities actually losing potential candidates?
   - If so, has this had a negative impact on the quality and diversity of the potential candidate pool?
   - Does the possibility of financial conflict of interest override the possibility of losing qualified candidates?
   - Can strict state ethics laws and school board policies incorporating accountability accomplish the same objectives as financial disclosure laws?

2. **School board standing committees:**

   A substantial percentage of school boards operate with subcommittees of the board, e.g., personnel, curriculum, negotiations, buildings and grounds, etc. At first glance, this may appear to be an efficient way to organize the board's work and to ensure in-depth knowledge for some members in major areas of board work. If properly utilized for in-depth study and information gathering, committees can enrich full board discussion and policymaking.

   However, these committees, in practice, often reinforce boards' tendencies to micromanage -- i.e., if there is a standing committee, the committee must have work to do. Board committees can also subvert the role of the superintendent as professional leader with the full board. Turf and control issues can also arise among board members over the power of "their" committees. In addition, board committees can diminish full board discussion and debate.

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Central questions for study and discussion on this topic might include:

- If school boards are reconfigured into true education policy boards, is there justification for board committees?
- Do board committees, in practice, subvert states' open meeting laws?
- Should school boards be prevented from establishing standing committees, but allowed to have ad hoc committees?

3. Teacher union influence on school board elections:

In what some observers believe is a growing number of school districts, teacher unions are increasing their control of school boards through influencing school board elections. This raises a basic question about whether boards are then controlled by the interests of those they employ. In addition, in some cases the increasing involvement of teacher unions in school board election campaigns has resulted in a new political phenomenon -- the division of boards between two types of members -- those whose major constituency is the union (whose members may or may not be residents of the school district in which they are employed) and those who have a broader citizen constituency.

Key questions for study and debate on this issue might include:

- Teacher unions, of course, are not the only special interest attempting to place "their" representatives on school boards. But, is the special interest issue different in the case of teacher unions because boards employ union members?
- Is there an inherent conflict of interest for board members who owe their election to the union?
- If teacher unions were precluded from political activity in school board elections would this constitute a denial of their basic democratic rights.

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ABOUT IEL

The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. (IEL), a Washington, D.C.-based not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to improving educational opportunities and results for all children and youth through the transformation of public education and development of collaboration among education, health care and social services at all levels of government and across the public, independent and for-profit sectors.

To carry out its mission, IEL works impartially to develop, sustain and inform established, new and emerging citizen, professional and political leaders, and to support reforming change in systems, policies and organizations.

IEL ...

- Promotes more effective leadership by informing decisionmakers in the public, independent and for-profit sectors about education policy issues, collaborative strategies, and leadership skills through consultation, seminars, ongoing work groups and conferences.
- Designs and conducts leadership development programs for policymakers and practitioners in education and across education and other human services.
- Encourages enlightened policymaking through forums where national, state, and local policymakers meet together and with their counterparts from the for-profit and independent sectors.
- Designs, implements and facilitates multi-sector collaborations, coalitions and partnerships in communities, states, and at the national level.
- Identifies and analyzes emerging trends and issues through demographic studies, research and demonstration programs; IEL integrates this knowledge into new programs and disseminates findings through a national publications program.

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